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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PRO-KURDISH DTP PARTY ELECTS HARDLINER AS  
NEW PARTY CHAIRMAN

REF: ANKARA 2605

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4(b),(d)

11. (C) Summary and Comment: Pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) members elected Nurettin Demirtas, 34, as party chairman and adopted the concept of "democratic autonomy" during a November 8 extraordinary convention in Ankara. Several Kurdish contacts believe the elevation of Demirtas, a hardliner who spent 10 years in prison for his PKK connections as a student, reflects increasing PKK control over the party. The mainstream Turkish establishment interprets DTP's calls for autonomy as a euphemism for secession, and has reacted by stepping up legal pressure and political rhetoric against the party. DTP's provocative course is testing the patience of the Turkish public and making the party an easy target for those seeking its demise. End summary and comment.

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DTP Elects Hardliner, Adopts "Autonomy" Platform  
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12. (U) Amid a massive police presence and heavy security measures, 878 DTP members gathered November 8 in Ankara at an extraordinary party convention held to elect party leadership and approve a party platform. In stark contrast to the norm, and in typical provocative fashion, DTP did not feature any pictures of Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the convention hall, nor did they open the meeting with the Turkish national anthem. At least one member, Nil Demirkazik, wore a badge depicting the "Kurdistan" region. In opening remarks, speakers paid homage to "martyrs of freedom and democracy."

13. (C) DTP members replaced greybeard Ahmet Turk with Nurettin Demirtas, 34, as the new party chairman. In his acceptance speech, Demirtas called on the government not to order a military operation against the PKK in northern Iraq, saying, "instead of moving their time, energy, and money across the border, they should spend it trying to construct brotherhood and social peace inside Turkey." Former Human Rights Association (HRA) president Yusuf Alatas told us Demirtas is considered less moderate than Turk, who surprised many in July when he crossed the floor after the parliamentary oath-taking ceremony to shake hands with far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli. Demirtas, who spent 10 years in prison for alleged

PKK membership as a student, is known for his occasional hardline rhetoric; he infuriated the Turkish public by stating, after a military operation that killed nine PKK militants, "the Turkish military should feel ashamed combating the PKK by sending a 10,000-strong army to combat just nine youngsters."

¶4. (C) DTP MP Sirri Sakik told us the party elected Demirtas because it wanted a leader who was not an MP and could therefore devote extensive time to the job. But contacts from outside the party believe the move signals the moderates have lost control. European Commission political officer Sema Kilicer contends the elevation of Demirtas indicates the party is increasingly controlled by its extremist wing, beholden to jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, while relative moderates like Turk are being sidelined. Rojbin Tugan, a Kurdish attorney from Hakkari, agreed that Demirtas' election shows the PKK is exerting increasing influence over the party. Participatory Democracy Party (KADEP) Chairman Serafettin Elci, a moderate Kurd who opposes the PKK, said Demirtas' election is insignificant because DTP leaders "are like civil servants" who merely implement decisions made by "Imrali," the island on which Ocalan is imprisoned.

¶5. (U) DTP delegates also adopted a new party platform based on "democratic autonomy," a concept that would devolve many central government responsibilities to some twenty-five regional assemblies, with each region attaining an autonomous status. DTP acting co-chair Selma Irmak told the assembly that the notion of "one flag, one country, and one language" has created conflict. "Democratic autonomy" would allow local authorities to make policy according to the needs of their constituents. Irmak and other speakers cited Bulgaria (which has a large ethnic Turkish population) as an example

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of a government granting extensive cultural rights, including education in the mother tongue, to its minorities. DTP's new platform also urges removal of the constitutional clause that identifies every citizen as a Turk and calls for emphasis instead on "Turkish citizenship."

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Establishment Expresses Growing Impatience with DTP  
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¶6. (SBU) According to the EU's Kilicer, the mainstream Turkish establishment generally views autonomy and federalism as euphemisms for, or a prelude to, secession. The convention caused a rise in the already significant legal pressure against DTP (reftel). Ankara's Chief Public Prosecutor is now investigating three DTP MPs who traveled to northern Iraq for the release of eight soldiers held hostage by the PKK; widely circulated photographs show the three signing a document alongside PKK members at the turnover meeting. DTP claims the document attested to the hostages' good health. The prosecutor also recently indicted Demirtas, along with 182 others, who allegedly evaded military service by using faked health certificates. The Prime Ministry has petitioned the Parliament's Speaker's office to lift the immunities of DTP MPs Serafettin Hali and Ibrahim Binici for their comments in the lead-up to July 22 general elections that allegedly incited public animosity.

¶7. (C) DTP's increasingly provocative remarks have engendered hostility from politicians of all stripes. MHP Deputy Group Chairman Mehmet Sandir urged a public prosecutor to investigate DTP MP Fatma Kurtulan because of her presence at the hostages' handover, and her husband's alleged PKK membership. Minister of Justice Mehmet Ali Sahin (AKP) said that DTP deputies will be held responsible if they persist in servicing the goals of the PKK. President Gul, who has shown himself more open to DTP than others, expressed his frustration with DTP's refusal to play the national anthem at its convention by telling reporters, "the Turkish flag, and national anthem are above politics." Only a handful of AKP's Kurdish MPs from southeastern Turkey still appear willing to

give DTP a chance. AKP Diyarbakir MP Abdurrahman Kurt told us DTP is feeling intense pressure from political parties and the PKK, and that politicians should give DTP MPs breathing space to work within parliament.

¶8. (U) Turkish press also has expressed growing disappointment with DTP. Yalcin Dogan of "Hurriyet" wrote that electing a chairman who had been imprisoned for ties to the PKK shows the PKK controls DTP. Moderate Turkish Daily News columnist Yusuf Kanli wrote on November 9, "we would like to consider DTP a political party but, through actions and remarks, it underlines every day that it has no such ambition and insists on being an agent of the separatist terrorist PKK gang of murder in the Turkish parliament." Yanli criticized the DTP for shunning the national anthem and concluded that "what DTP is doing is a disgrace to the electorate in the eastern and southeastern provinces that voted for the independent candidates in the last elections." In a November 14 column, "Radikal's" Murat Yetkin commented that the elevation of hardliners to leadership positions demonstrated PKK control over the party. The PKK, according to Yetkin, is trying to use the DTP by forcing it to adopt extreme position that disrupt US-Turkish-Kurdish cooperation against the PKK.

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DTP Responds to its Critics  
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¶9. (SBU) DTP's Sakik told us the ever-increasing pressure is part of a politically motivated harassment campaign against the party. Demirtas had offered to undergo another medical exam to disprove the charges that he had used a fake medical certificate to avoid military service. Kurtulan had also made clear she had been falsely accused; she was not the person seen in a photo with PKK militants. Sakik noted that the three DTP deputies who traveled to northern Iraq on November 4 to help secure the release of eight Turkish soldiers held by the PKK earned only accusations of treachery and collaboration from the media, and legal charges from the

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public prosecutor.

¶10. (SBU) Ahmet Turk, speaking at a meeting of DTP's parliamentary group, called the allegations part of a politically motivated campaign of harassment against the party. Turk said those who "defamed" the DTP or called the party separatist "are either blind or have ulterior motives." In reality, Turk continued, the DTP proposes "giving greater emphasis to our country and our flag. We seek greater democratization. There is only one DTP and it is the DTP firmly clasped together around peace and democracy. It will remain so whoever chairs the party."

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